

Department of Veterans Affairs

§ 1.561

shows the requester's handwritten signature. Information regarding where to fax the FOIA appeal is available on VA's FOIA home page on the Internet. See § 1.552(a) for the pertinent Internet address. A legible return address must be included with the FOIA appeal; the requester may include other contact information as well, such as a telephone number and electronic mail (e-mail) address.

(c) *How to file an e-mail appeal.* VA will accept a FOIA appeal by e-mail. If the appeal concerns documents protected by another confidentiality statute, the email transmission must contain an image of the requester's handwritten signature, such as an attachment that shows the requester's handwritten signature. In order to assure prompt processing, e-mail FOIA appeals must be sent to official VA FOIA mailboxes established for the purpose of receiving FOIA appeals; an e-mail FOIA appeal that is sent to an individual VA employee's mailbox, or to any other entity, will not be considered a perfected FOIA appeal. Mailbox addresses designated to receive e-mail FOIA appeals are available on VA's FOIA home page. See § 1.552(a) for the pertinent Internet address.

(d) *Time limits and content of appeal.* The appeal to the VA OGC (024), or VA Office of Inspector General (50), as appropriate, must be postmarked no later than sixty (60) calendar days after the date of the adverse determination. The appeal must clearly identify the determination being appealed, including any assigned request number. Other information should also be included, such as the name of the FOIA officer, the address of the component, the date of the component's determination, if any, and the precise subject matter of the appeal. If appealing only a portion of the component's determination, the requester must specify which part of the determination he or she is appealing. Copies of the request and VA's response, if any, should be included with the appeal. An appeal is not perfected until VA either receives the information identified above or the appeal is otherwise sufficiently defined. Appeals should be marked "Freedom of Information Act Appeal." The General Counsel, Deputy General Counsel, or

Assistant General Counsel with jurisdiction over information disclosure matters (024) will act on behalf of the Secretary on all appeals under this section, except those pertaining to the Office of Inspector General. The designated official in the Office of Inspector General will act on all appeals pertaining to Office of Inspector General records. A determination by the General Counsel, Deputy General Counsel, or Assistant General Counsel, or designated official within the Office of Inspector General, will be the final VA action.

(e) *Responses to appeals.* The Office of the General Counsel or the Office of Inspector General, as applicable, will provide the requester a decision on the appeal in writing. The decision will include a brief statement of the reasons for the decision, including, if applicable, any FOIA exemptions applied and notice of the right to judicial review of the decision.

(f) *Court review.* Unless the requester has been deemed to have exhausted all administrative remedies, he or she must first appeal the adverse determination in accordance with this section before seeking review by a court.

[76 FR 51895, Aug. 19, 2011]

§ 1.560 Maintenance and preservation of records.

(a) Each component will preserve all correspondence pertaining to FOIA requests as well as copies of pertinent records, until disposition is authorized under title 44, U.S.C., or the National Archives and Records Administration's General Records Schedule 14.

(b) The FOIA Officer must maintain copies of records that are the subject of a pending request, appeal, or lawsuit under the FOIA. A copy of all records shall be provided promptly to the Office of the General Counsel upon request.

[76 FR 51895, Aug. 19, 2011]

§ 1.561 Fees.

(a) *General.* Components will charge for processing requests under the FOIA in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section, except where fees are limited under paragraph (e) of this section or where a waiver or reduction of fees